



CENTERLINE

— PETE TRUDGEON —



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by PETE TRUDGEON



Dot Screen Studios

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For Mike:
Who tolerates me.

“Out of the Past into the future.”

~ Centerline city motto

**“When you feel that you have right on your side,
you can do some pretty horrific things.”**

~ Weather Underground member Brian Flanagan

ONE

POSTED ON BMIVALENTINE.COM ON 12-15-13
BY DEAN LIRIOUS

PIN-UP FAV VALENTINE USHER SETTLES IN THE LINE

What's up, just your boy Deano here. Well, it's been nearly a year since our fav girl, U.S.O. pin-up Valentine Usher was honorably discharged back into civilian life. Immediately afterward she went off grid and what many of us assumed to be the quiet life of self-imposed retirement.

But take heart my fellow Valentine admirers cause 'ol Dean here has it on good authority, thanks to my sources in all the right places, that our fav girl has just been approved for residency in the munitions district located in Centerline, Michigan. It seems our gal Val spent some time in the wilderness, you know what they say about Detroit, it's where the weak are killed and eaten, and that goes for the two as well as the four legged. Life under the dome will surely seem like paradise.

Our lovely Miss Usher isn't remaining idle she's joined the roster of exotic dancers at an establishment called 'Stray Katz' (meow!) where she'll be a featured performer. It seems all these prayers offered to see our fav girl in her birthday suit have finally been answered.

Yours truly has been hard at work to hook you all up with a video stream. So stay tuned cause in the very near future you'll be able to thrill to Valentine in the buff and in action.

TWO

Cal had given it considerable thought, him and Valentine, and he always came to the same conclusion, that their sleeping together had been inevitable. All those years filled with glances that lingered just a second too long, simultaneous reaches for the same object and not so accidental brushes of one body against another. They'd come so close to the cliff only to step back at the last second. Then came the night, they'd been in the Line for six months, Cal had come home and found Valentine watching television in her underwear. Like the saying goes, one thing led to another. When he awoke the next morning Cal's scalp was sore from Valentine's impassioned hair tugging, his back was a map of cat scratches and his neck sported a pair of hickies.

For a long time Cal had believed Valentine would never let a man touch her again. They'd spent nearly four months in the wilderness while on their way to the Line. He'd left her alone so he could search for water. It'd been a stupid thing to do, but Cal thought he'd be gone for only a few minutes. Besides she had a piece and knew how to use it and someone had to guard the car, the same one they scraped the day they reached the Line.

Who knows how long that wolf pack had been watching them, just waiting for the opportunity. Valentine had the urge to pee so before she dropped and squatted she'd set her gun down on the hood of the car. That's when they jumped her, although they didn't anticipate what a wildcat fighter she was. The one wearing the leather vest was about to penetrate her when Cal returned, his AK ready to cut them all in half. But he only lined them up, angel-faced Valentine who capped them, all three.

The youngest, a little shit who couldn't have been a day over twelve balled like a baby while he pleaded for his life. But Valentine had ice water coursing through her veins; she put two in his head, just like she'd done the others. Cal figured that experience would've flipped her to lezzie, except she never put much trust in either gender.

Two weeks later they finally reached the Line. They had their info processed, passed the physical and were cleared through security. First thing they did was hit a store so they could buy a six pack. They drank it in the parking lot, then sold that piece of shit car and checked into a motel. The next morning Cal had to go to police headquarters. He'd spent three years in the Middle East, it helped him cinch the cop gig and the ride on the gravy train began.

THREE

Before the war Centerline was a speck on a map, a city measuring only 1.7 square miles and resting inside the bigger suburbs of Warren like a dog turd on the sidewalk. Originally an enormous swamp, it'd been drained and cleared by a combination of French, German, Belgium and Irish immigrants and settled in 1837. It'd been those same French who named it Centerline because it was the middle of three Indian trails running from Fort Detroit to the northern trading posts. Nearly a hundred years later it was incorporated as a city, filled with auto workers, mostly shit kickers who'd migrated from the south.

But when the war started the first year of Obama's second term, well, everything changed. Most of Europe had flushed itself down the toilet, whole parts of England and France were Muslim territory where even cops feared to tread. America was circling the bowl, the lucky few were hoarding while the rest ate cat food, or the cat itself. Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit had to burn before the president finally admitted to being a mere mortal, but he was still mindful of his legacy so he started going to church, a lot. All those prayers must have worked cause sweet Jesus handed him a gift by having San Francisco nuked.

The government always claimed they didn't know who was responsible; it could've been North Korea, Iran, or Martians. Of course the conspiracy buffs thought it was an inside job while religious types said it was God's will, the smiting of the modern day Sodom and Gomorrah. Eventually the president, along with the majority of the country blamed the Middle East as a whole, we never trusted those oil peddling, rug kissers anyway.

Frisco getting wiped off the map was the prelude for the domino fall. They finally put up the damn fence, massive deportations began, many who worshipped Allah didn't wait to be asked to leave. Obama discovered his inner hawk and plunged America into the biggest war since WWII sporting a blue steel hard-on. Lefties all across the country ranted, raved and sobbed like a collection of jilted lovers. Everyone knew the game was rigged, but it was the only game in town.

Valentine had just gotten out of her cap and gown then told high school to go fuck itself. Cal had barely tasted his first beer of the summer when the draft was reinstated. Twelve weeks later he was shipped off to Libya. On the way over some asshole said, "Don't worry, this shit will be over by Christmas," and jinxed the entire world.

While Cal was dodging bullets Valentine decided to join the U.S.O., she was quickly assigned to the newly created V-Girl department where she, along with dozens of other young women, travelled across the country for war bond drives and troop send offs. Many noticed the girls outfits were barely there, but it was for the boys so few disapproved aloud.

Valentine caught the eye of a higher up who decided her magic would be one hell of a morale booster. One photo shoot later and the resulting photos of Valentine in a stars and stripes bikini could be found in every soldier's barracks, including Cal's. It soon after gained a place on many a teenage boy's bedroom wall.

Centerline had been expanded, rezoned into a munitions district. Eminent Domain was used to relocate most of its eight thousand residents although a handful of local businesses were allowed to stay. The entire city was sealed under a dome made

of charged plasma; inside an electrified fence was added for extra security.

Due to the nature of the weapons produced plant workers were rigorously screened, when someone signed up for a job in the Line it was for the long haul, three years minimum. The only way out was in a coffin or an end to the war. Workers were on a rotating schedule, four days on, three off. Down time was devoted to recreation aided by genetically engineered marijuana and alcohol that gave the buzz without the side effects.

The media that was allowed in was carefully screened for maximum patriotic effect, America; the last best example of liberty would triumph, eventually. But the war was rarely a topic of concern for the population of the Line. Compared to what was going on outside and overseas life in the Line was sweet, and being a cop was the sweetest. What you said went and fuck 'em if they couldn't take a joke. Not that there was much crime to fight, the occasional brawl, the busting up of a still of home brew. Sometimes a good 'ol boy would get some of that white lightning in him and make a run for the fence, but for the most part things were peaceful. So, while most of the world scratched its eyes out, Cal and Valentine had never had it better.

FOUR

POSTED ON BMIVALENTINE.COM ON 1-20-14

BY DEAN LIRIOUS

VALENTINE'S STREAMING DEBUT: HOTTIE TOTTIE
HEALTHCARE

Finally, the wait is over. 'Ol Deano offers a thousand apologies, turns out I had a few more palms to grease than I'd originally thought. But I'd decided long ago at the start of this venture that duckets were no object. So, to all of you out there who doubted the Dean's power, look no further except to check out our premiere presentation. A Valentine to all you Valentine devotees.

Stray Katz is run by the regal Miss Lila Dean (no relation to the Deano) who prefers her girls to use the old school theatrical touches, real all-American Burly-Q, complete with a theme for the day. Our fav girl takes the stage dressed as the naughtiest nurse you've ever laid eyes on, who knew white could be so wicked. Check out that bitchin' bob cut and dig them candy stripes. I don't need a thermometer to know I'm running a fever.

FIVE

Valentine had chosen Stray Katz because of its name. Half the clubs that lined the main drag called Van Dyke had kitschy names, The Treasure Chest, All-Girls School, and Teasers were just a few examples. She'd also liked the sign that hung above the front entrance, spelled out in pink neon, the "S" and "K" in bold capitals while the remaining letters were written in cursive. There was a figure, a Betty Page look-a-like dressed in a leopard print bikini, cat ears and tail, posed so she was using the "S" as a scratching post.

The Club's owner Lila Dean was both stern as a nun and gentle as a grandmother depending on the situation. She'd worked in burlesque back in the day when a stripper could gain status of national fame. Lila had known them all: Lily St. Scar, Tempest Storm, both women's autographed eight by tens were behind silver frames and hung on her office wall. They shared space with the other ladies, Lila's own wall of fame.

She wore her silver hair in a tastefully teased Jackie O. bouffant, favored floor length gowns, mink wraps and diamonds dangled from her ears, encircled her thin neck and winked at you from eight of her ten fingers. Valentine's audition was simple and brief, it consisted of going to Lila's office where she was asked to strip down then Lila gave her a visual once over. She was pleased that Valentine's body was tattoo free.

"They're not lady like," she remarked.

Valentine had never had the desire to get one, besides U.S.O. V-Girls weren't allowed to have them. After she got dressed Valentine improvised some moves to 'In My House' by the Mary Jane Girls for about a minute. After she turned off the

music Lila gave Valentine a satisfied smile.

“You’ll do well here Miss Usher. But always remember, you’re a professional, I won’t tolerate any lewd behavior on-stage. So, my dear, when can you start?”

Cal had fronted her some cash so Valentine could buy herself a new look. First, she had her hair cut into an above-the-shoulder bob, then had the stylist put in some blood red streaks, which complemented her natural raven color. The rest of the money went for some outfits. Cal was able to stick around for part of Valentine’s first shift. She could tell he liked what he was seeing and it reignited the flame inside her. She made enough to pay him back, in full, within a matter of days.

Valentine could’ve made twice as much of the long green if she’d gone into flat backing. It was legal in the Line; the typical split with the house was forty-sixty. The brothels were clean and except for the security detail they were entirely owned and operated by women, madams who took even less shit than the cops. Rape was a death penalty offense, there was no worry of pregnancy or STDs, everyone in the Line got a twice yearly shot, a combination of contraception and anti-viral. Not that anyone came to the Line to raise a family. So, for Valentine working at Stray Katz was logical, she had the moves and had been born with a stripper’s name.

SIX

July, outside the Line Michigan was getting baked, Detroit would be like Hell with the lights on, at night was when the shit would get really hairy. But under the dome the environment was kept at a comfortable 72 degrees year round. Cal lay in bed watching the shadows of tree branches as they swayed across the ceiling. As she was in the habit of doing at least three days a week Valentine had woken Cal by climbing atop him and initiating a morning quickie. Immediately after orgasm she'd dismount and light up a post coital joint.

Cal turned his head to take in the sight of her, skin lightly damp with sweat, her ruby navel ring refracting sun light. She exhaled a final thin curl of purple smoke before she snuffed out the roach in a heavy crystal ashtray.

“How long before rye bread arrives?” she asked.

It was the nickname of Cal's partner Ryan Nader. The guy was a bit of an asshole, a fact he was completely aware of. Nobody remembered who'd bestowed the sobriquet, but it'd stuck, like gum on the bottom of a shoe, although no one used it to Ryan's face.

Cal checked the bedside clock. It told him it was three minutes after seven a.m.

“About an hour,” he said.

“Want something to eat before you go?”

“No thanks.”

Valentine began to rub his leg with her foot, something that

always inspired a new erection. But then the sound of Cal's cell phone blaring 'You got Another Thing Coming' by Judas Priest took his attention. It was Ryan's ring tone and the man rarely called this early. Cal picked up the phone, hit the video option on the touch screen.

'Yeah.'

Ryan's face filled the screen. "Get some clothes on, I'm outside."

The screen went black. Even in one sentence Cal could hear the agitation in his partner's voice, but despite Ryan's distress Cal still took time to shower, dress and plant a goodbye kiss on Valentine.

Ryan had parked their cruiser in front of Cal's house, he leaned against the reinforce hull inhaling from a one-hitter. Cal wasn't a pot smoker, he knew more than a few badges who used on-duty. He didn't disapprove; the engineered stuff didn't dumb a person down. Still, he found himself wishing Ryan would exercise some discretion.

"There's been a break," he announced.

It was supposed to be impossible to break into a munitions district. There had been a handful of attempts, all unsuccessful. "Are you sure?"

Ryan vigorously rubbed his shaved head.

"A sewer tunnel, one older than Zeus' balls, DPW is claiming it doesn't show up on any of the rezoning maps. Captain Tyson is on scene and was expecting us fifteen minutes ago."

Without another word Ryan got in the driver's side.

Before entering the cruiser Cal turned and saw Valentine in the door way. She blew him a kiss and disappeared back inside.

SEVEN

The drive to the breach site took less than five minutes, Ryan remained tense, the pot hadn't seemed to have helped his mood, he kept glancing at Cal apparently waiting for a reaction to the news. But Cal remained silent; he wasn't going to make an assessment until he had all the facts.

"You're taking this calmly, do you understand what this means?" Ryan asked.

Cal lit a cigarette. "We finally have to start working for a living."

"Why do you always have to be so fucking cute? All it takes is one successful hit on a plant and all those pukes will get inspired."

Ryan had a tendency to forecast the worst possible outcome.

"That's not going to happen because we're not going to let it. Bypassing plant security is a whole lot more difficult than crawling out of a hole. Besides, for all intents and purposes this is a small town, unfamiliar faces tend to stick out."

"What if it's an inside job? For all we know they've been coming and going for months and it's just dumb luck we found out."

It was something Cal hadn't considered, but he chose not to vocalize it. He turned his attention to the shield, which glowed a coral pink in the morning sun. When their cruiser arrived at the intersection of Sherwood and Rinker they saw a half dozen other police vehicles already parked at the curb. Ryan found a

space in front of an empty lot that'd once been a trailer park. Standing fifty yards ahead was a small cluster of badges standing in a circle, cigarettes dangling, cups of coffee tipping, all were staring at the same spot.

At six foot four Captain Ellis Tyson stood out. Barrel chested but muscular, his thinning straw blonde hair combed back. He had narrow eyes and a hooked nose that gave him the look of a pissed off gargoyle. He caught sight of Cal and Ryan and jerked his chin up in greeting. The other badges muttered their hellos. Every time he saw the captain Cal always took a second to notice his superior's night stick. Unlike the retractable graphite model carried by Cal and the others Tyson's was made of oak and handmade. He'd inherited it from his father, a Detroit cop who'd had a beat in the nineteen 60s and 70s. Amongst select company the captain would share stories of the skulls his old man cracked during the '67 riots.

"What do we got captain?" Ryan asked, as if I wasn't obvious. The manhole cover, which at some point had been paved over lay inches for the perfectly round hole in the ground.

Captain Tyson let out a snort. "Troubles what we got, this tunnel goes almost three miles into old Warren. That sides been resealed, bomb squads already been through, no booby traps which means they had future plans for it."

Cal glanced down the hole, nothing but a black void. "Is the DPW still claiming ignorance?" he asked.

Tyson hocked up and spit in the hole. "Yeah, but it seems for once they're telling the bible truth. Not that it matters, we're the ones who are going to have to track down these sons a bitches."

The captain's attention was taken by the arrival of a DPW truck, a never washed white, six wheeled monster that farted exhaust and stank of diesel. When the driver jumped down from the cab Tyson was there to greet him. Cal couldn't hear what was said, but judging by the way the DPW man's head was bobbing up and down it was a real lashing, Tyson thought public works was nothing but a collection of gold bricks. After he finished the dressing down Tyson ordered everyone back to headquarters, they were getting a call from Natalie Coulter, director of the anti-sedition forces.

also by Pete Trudgeon



SUMMER_{of} ANTOINETTE

Matthew Dante is a screenwriter living the idle, good life in Europe. After the tragic death of his family he's forced to return to America. Matthew sets about reacquainting himself with his childhood home. Almost immediately his life is altered the day he meets Antoinette Mouse, an alluring teenage girl, staying with her aunt over the summer. They begin a taboo affair that at times turns hallucinogenic and introduces him to the Bronze Peacock, a secret society dedicated to the worship of the nymph. As sinister forces threaten their relationship, he begins to suspect his love may be something more than just an ordinary girl.



World War 2.5 is all the rage, but in the munitions sector of Centerline, life is sweet and sin is legal. Exotic dancer Valentine Usher and her cop boyfriend Cal, enjoy a tranquil existence under the dome until the New Weather Underground infiltrate and begin a campaign of terror.

Soon Valentine finds she has become the target of a vendetta by persons unknown and is forced into battle for her life. But her enemies are about to discover that this All-American girl is mad, bad and dangerous to know but always easy on the eyes.

Centerline is a satirical look at politics, the war on terror and the battle of the sexes, set in a world where war is hell for some, fun for others.

Pete Trudgeon is a writer, director and occasional actor. His first film, *After The Blood Rush*, was produced in 2008 and he has since appeared in several independent films. *Centerline* is his second novel. He currently lives in Michigan.

